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MAHATHIR-PORT

"M'SIA WANTS THE COUNTRY TO BECOME A REGIONAL SHIPPING HUB

SERDANG, Jan 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said Malaysia plans to expand all its ports to make the country a regional shipping hub.

"We want to expand all our ports, not just PTP (Port of Tanjung Pelepas). We are as strategic as Singapore," he told newsmen after attending a gathering of students and staff of Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) here today.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on report that Taiwanese container giant, Evergreen Marine Corp has formally decided to shift its transshipment hub from Singapore to PTP.

Evergreen and PTP was reported to have signed a memorandum of understanding to make the shift by August this year after its Virtual Terminal Agreement with PSA Corporation expires.

Evergreen's move, in the footsteps of global container carrier Maersk Sealand which shifted its hub-port operations to PTP in 2000, is expected to deal a heavy blow to Singapore's leading port operator, PSA Corporation.

PSA lost 10 percent of container volume last year due to the Maersk pullout and global slowdown. Maersk, with an annual 1.8 million TEUs, was PSA's biggest customer.

Dr Mahathir said in the old days, Singapore was strategic because of its location at the southern tip of Peninsular Malaysia.

However in today's fast-changing shipping environment, such considerations no longer apply. he said.

"So there is no reason Malaysia cannot be a hub for shipping routes in the region," he said.

"I hope that Singapore will accept that (the change) is the result of fair competition," he said. -- BERNAMA

LES SEL